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ABSTRACT

Students with special needs are increasingly taught in the least restrictive environment, which often means the general education classroom. Mainstreaming and inclusion provide the most appropriate education for each student in the least restrictive setting, considering the education needs of students rather than their clinical labels. A key ingredient of the legislative mandate for mainstreaming is the development of an individualized education plan (IEP) for each student with disabilities. The general education classroom teacher's total involvement in the team process is the key to successful implementation of the IEP. A student with special needs will benefit from the same individualized approach to learning that every student needs. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common disorders among children. While at times this disorder can be frustrating to the teacher and disruptive to the classroom, there are effective environmental and instructional strategies that the teacher can take advantage of to ensure a successful learning climate for the child with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Gifted students also require instruction matched to their needs. Today's schools are recognizing their special needs, and teachers are differentiating their reading instruction to meet these needs. In this manner, all students are ensured of an equal opportunity to succeed in school. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

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Academic diversity:
Reading instruction for students with special needs

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Addressing individual student needs in reading instruction has always been an immense responsibility for teachers of reading. Providing appropriate reading instruction that meets the needs of individual students within a group demands many lengthy hours of preparation and hard work by teachers. Classroom teachers have continuously adapted their instruction to accommodate an ever expanding and changing group of students. Today, with the emphasis on including students with special needs into the general education classroom, mainstream teachers are further searching for effective means to provide relevant reading education for students with special needs.

Special students are those who have unique needs. Included among this group are physically disabled, emotionally disabled, learning disabled, and gifted. Special students may or may not have learning difficulties; however, they often require distinctive teaching. Such teaching is intended to ensure that special students are successful learners. Traditionally, students with special needs have been served by teachers other than the general education classroom teacher in either pullout or self-contained special education settings. Recently, though, because of efforts to comply with the tenets of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students with special needs are often

placed in general education classrooms with the understanding that the general education teacher will modify instruction to meet their needs. An understanding of the issues that impact the instruction of students with special needs in the general education classroom is, therefore, of vital importance to general education teachers.

In the following paragraphs we provide (1) an overview of legislation that impacted the present spotlight on classroom inclusion for students with special needs, and (2) a discussion of the special needs reflected in classroom reading programs, focusing on attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and giftedness. We chose to discuss the special needs of these children to illustrate the range of academic diversity within reading programs that truly embrace an inclusionary model of instruction.

Landmark Legislation

In 1975, the passage of P.L. 94-142 (the Education for all Handicapped Children Act) was passed, which is one of the more recent significant developments in U.S. education. This law affected the placement of students with disabilities and allowed for students with disabilities to be mainstreamed into regular classrooms. The act clearly indicated that children with disabilities must be placed in the ▪ least restrictive environment,▪ which was interpreted, in many cases, as the same environment as for regular students. This trend to educate children with disabilities in the closest possible proximity to the regular classroom in which they can succeed was often

referred to as mainstreaming. Lewis and Doorlag (1991) define mainstreaming as, ▪ [The] inclusion of special students in the general educational process. Students are considered mainstreamed if they spend any part of the school day with regular class peers. In a typical mainstreaming program, special students in regular classrooms participate in instructional and social activities side by side with their classmates. Often they receive additional instruction outside the regular classroom from a special educator such as a resource teacher▪ (pp. 3-4).

In 1990 P.L. 94-142 was amended to allow for provisions and changes to the terminology of the act. This caused the new act, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to reflect a more sensitive approach to the individual rather than highlighting the disability (First & Curcio, 1993). As part of the concern for the individual, mainstreaming in general has been reexamined. Students with special needs who were commonly mainstreamed into general education classrooms were often involved in many pullout programs, such as reading resource instruction or Chapter I. This fragmentation of the school day has motivated some concern for the individual student and advanced the question: Is this the best instructional setting to meet the academic necessities of the child with special needs? Such a question has led us to seek a more effective academic environment for children with special needs. As a result of a greater sensitivity to the individual needs of students with special needs, inclusion has been proposed as a viable solution.

Inclusion means that special needs students are assigned to general education classrooms for the full instructional day and are allowed to participate in all school activities and functions. Modifications are made in instruction and curriculum and support is provided by specialists within the general education classroom setting when deemed appropriate. This type of inclusive atmosphere, therefore, dictates adequate support systems. Classrooms must be made physically accessible to accommodate all students with special needs. In addition to the physical setting, provisions need to be made for additional personnel, staff development, and technical assistance. This may mean that in addition to the general education classroom teacher, a special education teacher will be made available to co-teach the entire class. Such co-teaching arrangements result in the special education teacher becoming involved in the instruction of the whole class so that students do not become conscious of students with special needs (Friend & Cook, 1992).

For inclusion to work teachers need to create a classroom atmosphere where differences are addressed up front and accepted by everyone in the class. The intent is to promote a reading classroom where students become amalgamated into a group that is continuously developing as readers; no student is singled out because he or she is different. The students in the class are as much responsible for the success of inclusion as are the classroom and special education teachers. One way to ensure student involvement in the inclusion process is to use

cooperative groups as an instructional strategy. By allowing students to work cooperatively in groups, all students share in the contributions to the learning process and develop a positive attitude toward individual differences.

Creating a Classroom that Embraces Academic Diversity

The success of students placed in the least restrictive environment depends upon the cooperation of teachers, administrators, specialized personnel, and parents. In essence, however, individual teachers' ability to meet the needs of all students in the general education classroom determines the success or failure of such efforts. Implications for the reading instructional program are clear--it must employ a variety of instructional and organizational techniques to suit a wide range of student abilities and encourage the constructive interaction of students with special needs with general education students.

Most children with special needs do not require specialized reading instructional techniques, but simply quality reading instruction founded on an assessment of their reading strengths and weakness. Indeed, the similarities among children with special needs and general education children are greater than the differences. Labeling children gives teachers little usable information about how to develop an appropriate instructional program that works with the academic diversity within their reading programs. A positive aspect of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is that it shifts the focus away from use of labels and toward consideration of students' educational needs.

The vehicle for providing the most appropriate educational program for students with special needs is an individualized education plan (IEP). An IEP is a written plan for each child with special needs, detailing his or her educational program. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), the IEP must include the following:

- The student's present achievement level, including the student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.
- A statement of annual goals and benchmarks of attaining these goals.
- A listing of long-range and short-term instructional goals that include the materials, strategies, and assessment measures to indicate mastery of the objectives.
- A statement detailing specific special educational services to be provided to the student and the extent to which the student will participate in the general education classroom.
- The classroom accommodations that need to be made to provide general teaching techniques and subject matter modifications to enable the child to learn to his or her potential.
- Identification of the person(s) (or agents) responsible for teaching each objective.
- Project data for the beginning of program services and the anticipated duration of the services.

The IEP is an educational program that the multidisciplinary team, which includes the school, teachers, children, and parents, develop jointly. The basic ingredients of an IEP are not new--they are essentially those of a good teaching plan. It is

important to avoid thinking of inclusion (or least restrictive environment) as separate or different from the basic principles associated with any good learning environment. The principles of a quality learning environment include all aspects of an IEP, and thus the process of equal education for all children.

Inclusion of the Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Child

In today's classrooms many children are described as having difficulty staying on task and maintaining attention. These children are often labeled as having attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Neuwirth (1994) and the ERIC Digest (1996) estimate that approximately three to five percent of the United States' school age population is affected by attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. This disorder is the most frequently occurring disorder to affect our school age children. According to Fowler (1994) the attention deficit disorder is a syndrome in which the learner is characterized by having serious and persistent difficulties in the following three areas: attention span, impulse control, and often accompanying hyperactivity.

Students in the past who were affected by ADHD were often referred to as having hyperkinesis, a minimal brain disorder, hyperactivity, or a learning disability. Often these children spent part or all of their instructional time outside the general education classroom. They may have been placed in a special education classroom, reading clinic or resource classroom, or alternative classroom for children with behavioral problems. Today, these children are included in the general education

classroom and are often the most academically capable in reading when their special needs are met. ADHD may be a relatively new term, but the disorder has been found in the medical literature for over a 100 years. The American Psychiatric Association, (1994) citated in an ERIC digest noted that in order for a child to be diagnosed with the attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder a child had to display for 6 months or more at least eight of the following fourteen characteristics prior to the age of seven:

- Fidgets, squirms or seems restless.
- Has difficulty remaining seated.
- Is easily distracted.
- Has difficulty waiting turn.
- Blurts out answers.
- Has difficulty following instructions.
- Has difficulty sustaining attention.
- Shifts from one uncompleted task to another.
- Has difficulty playing quietly.
- Talks excessively.
- Interrupts or intrudes on others.
- Does not seem to listen.
- Often loses things necessary for tasks.
- Frequently engages in dangerous actions.

Obviously children displaying these characteristics may demonstrate difficulties in the areas of learning to read and write. To help treat this condition doctors often prescribe stimulants such as Ritalin to help reduce hyperactivity and improve the student's ability to focus, work and learn. The use

of medication, however, has sparked quite a debate (Neuwirth, 1994). On the one hand, many of the critics argue that medication is often prescribed unnecessarily and that some students on medication often experience weight loss, grow at slower rates and have difficulty with their sleep patterns. On the other hand, many children with ADHD have been helped tremendously with proper medication. If doctors carefully monitor a child's height, weight, and overall development, the use of medication to help control attention-deficit disorder is extremely beneficial to the student and the positive results far outweigh the potential side effects.

While the use of medication is one way to help manage the behavior of the ADHD child, teachers can also provide behavioral support by creating an environment conducive to academic performance. Such an environment is crucial for literacy instruction because of the need for the student to devote full attention to comprehending, writing, and learning from meaningful text. Teachers who give careful consideration to the following environmental features will facilitate ADHD students' benefiting from literacy instruction tasks.

- Seat students with ADHD near the teacher's desk, but include them as part of the general education class seating.
- Place ADHD students up front with their back to the rest of the class to keep other students out of view.
- Surround students with ADHD with good role models, preferably students whom they view as significant others.

- Support and encourage peer tutoring and cooperative and collaborative learning.
- Avoid distracting stimuli. Try not to place students with ADHD near air conditioners, high traffic areas, heaters, or doors or windows.
- Avoid or minimize physical relocation (monitor them closely on field trips), changes in schedule, and disruptions.
- Create a stimuli-reduced study area. Let all students have access to this area so the students with ADHD are not singled out as being different.
- Provide parents with suggestions on how to set up a study space at home if possible, with set times and routines established for study, parental review of completed homework, and notebook and materials organization.

Classroom environment is crucial to helping students with ADHD be included as productive member of the classroom. Along with the predictability and enhanced ability to focus that a structured environment provides, attention to instructional features when teaching literacy will help to meet the students' with ADHD academic needs in a diverse classroom. The following instructional guidelines are easily applied in a variety of reading instructional settings.

- When culturally appropriate, maintain eye contact with the child during verbal instruction.
- Present directions in a clear and concise manner. Daily directions should be consistent and predictable as possible.

- Clarify complex directions and avoid multiple commands. Break complex directions into smaller chunks and give students with ADHD one part of the direction at a time. Ask students with ADHD to repeat directions back to the teacher.
- Help students feel comfortable with seeking assistance (Many children with ADHD will not often seek help).
- Gradually reduce teacher support; however these children may need teacher support for a longer period of time than many other children need.

Teachers who modify their reading instruction to meet the needs of the children with ADHD will help these students realize their full academic potential and allow them to experience success in a general education classroom, where more often than not they will truly excel.

Inclusion of the Academically Gifted Child

As many elementary teachers have come to realize, the ADHD child is often academically gifted, which increases the breadth of the teachers' responsibility for providing an appropriate reading instructional program. A continued thrust in the public schools is the development of programs for gifted students that was initiated nationwide when U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland defined (1972) the gifted and talented as ``those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the general education

school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society'' (16). The U.S. Office of Education has identified six areas of giftedness: (1) general intellectual ability, (2) specific academic aptitude, (3) creativity, (4) leadership ability, (5) ability in the visual or performing arts, and (6) psychomotor ability. Gifted students may demonstrate capability of exceptional performance in only one or two areas or may excel in several areas at once.

With specific reference to reading abilities, Shaughnessy, Siegel, & Stanley (1994) and Dooley (1993) noted that gifted students' cognitive skills are advanced beyond the activities and materials normally provided for students at their age and grade level. Common reading capabilities and behaviors of gifted students include the following:

- A rich, well-developed vocabulary and interest in words.
- Early reading ability prior to entering school.
- An advanced linguistic ability in sentence construction,
- expression of ideas, and listening vocabulary.
- An interest in library books and reading in a variety of
- topic areas.
- An early interest in learning to write and in writing creative stories.
- Frequent use of information sources, such as the dictionary,
- encyclopedia, and information text, to explore ideas and areas of interest.
- An enhanced ability in the area of critical thinking.
- An inquisitive nature to learn.

- Comprehension abilities at early grade levels that exceed the literal level and demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of ideas.
- Well-developed reading skills and abilities by the end of first grade.

Identifying gifted children and designing a curriculum to meet their learning needs should be accomplished through a variety of formal and informal assessment procedures. Standardized achievement tests, intelligence tests, creativity measures, actual student performance in the reading program, peer nomination procedures, and parent and teacher observations are avenues to employ for this purpose. Also, giftedness is not reserved for any one group or class of children. Teachers should not be preoccupied with ethnicity or social characteristics when identifying the gifted and talented. To identify giftedness in children who speak a language other than English, it is important to employ informal assessment procedures. These children often cannot be administered formal tests to determine giftedness because the tests are not available in languages understood and spoken by non-English speakers.

For too long, gifted children were expected to follow along with the general education reading curriculum utilized by a school or district. Yes, they were often given more to do, but it was more of the same curriculum rather than an adaptation of the curriculum. Today's reading teachers and program administrators realize that gifted children have unique needs, as

do all students, and require differentiated instructional programs, practices, and support. Gifted readers are not all the same; each has unique strengths and weaknesses and, as such, need the same diagnostically based instruction afforded all learners (Shaughnessy et al. 1994). Indeed, many gifted children are readers who reflect special needs when their reading performance is compared to their reading potential. As a result, gifted children require an instructional program that reflects the diversity of their capapbilities.

There are several avenues available to meet gifted readers' needs in the classroom. One way to enhance the gifted students reading performance is to make use of curriculum compacting (Dooley, 1993). Curriculum compacting assures student mastery of basic skills at a proficient and often increased rate in order to make time for enrichment and acceleration. To make use of curriculum compacting teachers must develop assessment measures that will allow them to identify students' acquired skills and capabilities in content areas related to the next reading unit. Once the skills and content have been identified as already being mastered, the teacher does not have to provide instructional activities in those areas. This allows the teacher to concentrate on undeveloped skills and content and provide additional enrichment activities without losing any instructional time. This form of instruction allows the gifted student to progress through reading materials at an appropriate pace (Dooley, 1993).

Two other instructional approaches for the gifted child are content and process modifications (Dooley,1993. Content modifications enable the gifted reader to read more complex and in-depth selections. The selections that the gifted student reads can be related to the same theme, topic or genre of the general education classroom instruction. For example if students were studying World War II, all students might be encouraged to read The Diary of Anne Frank during reading instruction. In addition to The Diary of Anne Frank the gifted child might also read Zlata's Diary so they could make connections between the way Jewish people of Nazi Germany suffered and the way the Bosnians of Sarajevo suffered. These types of content modifications allow gifted students more control over their academic content.

Process modification is implemented through activities and questions that require higher level thought that are used in critical and creative reading comprehension. Process modifications that require students to become critical readers enhances their abilities to make judgements about the authenticity, accuracy, and validity of what they read.

Although research and practice support instructional practices such as compacting the curriculum, modifying content, and modifying process; many teachers do not use these approaches. One underlying reason for this lack of implementation is classroom management. If each gifted child is instructed at his or her instructional level, how does the classroom teacher organize and plan for a high percentage of academically engaged time for all students? Curriculum compacting should be done to

assess every child; by determining the needs of students, time is freed up for enrichment activities. Instructional time in the classroom for reading can be wasted if many of the students have already mastered the skills and content being taught. Teachers who maximize the effective utilization of content and process modifications are not adding more work to their instructional day, but they are actually enhancing the content of what they are teaching.

Whereas the reading curriculum goals are the same for gifted readers as for all readers, many individuals think that the reading program should be differentiated in terms of content covered, methods taught, and pacing of instruction for gifted readers (Lewis & Doorlag, 1991). Thus, a wide variety of literature should be used to tap gifted students' abilities and interests. Availability of books ranging from award winning literature to popular serials is a primary ingredient in creating the successful recipe that satisfies the appetites of gifted readers.

A greater emphasis on thinking and reasoning skills is recommended for teaching gifted readers. Integrating the language arts with the development of critical thinking can also be accomplished by teaching writing as a thinking process (Jampole, Konopak, Readence, & Moser, 1991). Developing writing skills as a logical thinking process enables gifted students to refine, synthesize, and elaborate upon their understanding of a particular topic.

Gifted students learn material faster than other learners and thus require fewer practice and application activities. Yet, the overriding concern for gifted readers is that they too need instruction in various reading skills and strategies. The foundation for such differentiated instruction is the diagnosis of students' reading strengths and weaknesses from which emerges an instructional plan that considers the learning needs of the student. To provide the decisive and most effective lessons for gifted students the teacher must consider their abilities, needs, and interests. Once again, this should not be considered an extra burden by the teacher. Instead, it should be considered part of the daily instructional practice and reflection that the teacher uses with all students.

The ability to work effectively with the students' diversities is crucial to teaching reading. Teachers who are compelled to recognize and address the academic concerns of students with special needs in the general education classroom are better able to create an effective learning environment. The ability of teachers to handle differences effectively translates into instructional practices that provide for each student's self-respect and that lead all students to feel secure in the classroom.

Students with special needs are increasingly taught in the least restrictive environment, which often means the general education classroom. Mainstreaming and inclusion provide the most appropriate education for each student in the least restrictive setting, considering the educational needs of students rather

than their clinical labels. A key ingredient of the legislative mandate for mainstreaming is the development of an individualized education plan (IEP) for each student with disabilities. The general education classroom teacher's total involvement in the team process is the key to successful implementation of the IEP. A student with special needs will benefit from the same individual approach to learning that every student needs.

ADHD is one of the most common disorders among children, and on the average, at least one child in every classroom in the United States experiences this disorder. While at times this disorder can be frustrating to the teacher and disruptive to the classroom, there are effective environmental and instructional strategies that the teacher can take advantage of to ensure a successful learning climate for the child with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Gifted students also require instruction matched to their needs. Today's schools are recognizing their special needs, and teachers are differentiating their reading instruction to meet these needs. In this manner, all students are ensured of an equal opportunity to succeed in school.

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